



WISCONSIN COUNCIL ON INVASIVE SPECIES

Jim Doyle, Governor

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For Immediate Release

DON'T SHARE YOUR HOLIDAYS WITH UNWANTED INSECTS

MADISON—There are times when you must share the holidays with unwanted guests. Sharing your holidays with unwanted insects can be almost as unpleasant. Careful selection and examination of wood-based gifts or holiday craft items can at least help to keep the six-legged creatures out of your home and surrounding environments.

Federal and state officials have found that holiday items imported from other countries can carry insects. Infested items have included semi-artificial Christmas trees with real wood trunks and intact tree bark, scented potpourri with pinecones, and twig towers that are used as a garden trellis. The insects found were different types of wood-boring beetles or bark beetles.

Governor Jim Doyle is concerned about this potential vector of invasive species into the state: "Should these wood borers and bark beetles come into the state on holiday items, the insects could become established in our outdoor environments and have serious economic and environmental impacts by attacking our trees," Governor Doyle said.

"The insects that were in these items are not native to the United States. We can't risk having these insects becoming established here in Wisconsin where they then become a threat to our timber industry or to our urban landscape," explained Bob Dahl, plant regulation section chief with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP). "States like Michigan, Illinois and New York are battling Asian Long Horned beetle and Emerald Ash Borer. Although these insects didn't enter the U.S. on holiday items, unwanted, non-native insects pose a risk to our natural environment and require a great deal of tax dollars and other resources to eliminate them," Dahl said.

A Cornell University study estimated that invasive species have cost the nation more than \$120 billion each year. The costs are for losses in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and the cost of removing or controlling the invasive plants, animals or insects.

Governor Doyle asks that consumers serve as the first line of defense against these alien invaders. "Ordinary citizens should be vigilant as they shop for the holidays and throughout the year." In 2003, an alert consumer noticed insects within a bag of pinecone potpourri that was purchased at a national discount chain. The pinecones

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came from India and the insects were identified as a type of Longhorned beetle that wasn't native to the United States. Bags of the infested potpourri were removed from shelves across the country.

If you purchase wooden holiday items that have intact bark or pinecones, particularly if the items were made overseas, check them over carefully. Fresh pine wreaths, especially those with pinecones, should also be examined before hanging. Look for fine or powdery sawdust (which indicates the presence of a wood-boring insect that is living in the wood or wooden item), holes, and dead or live insects. Also carefully check other wooden craft and hobby items imported from overseas such as bird houses. "If you notice any of these conditions, please contact DATCP," Dahl said. "If there are insects, whether dead or alive, please capture them and place them in a small container so we can examine and identify the insects. Then **call 1-800-462-2803** to tell us what you have found." If possible, place the entire purchased item in a plastic bag or container as well to prevent the emergence of additional insects. If you discover possibly infested items in a store, state officials recommend that you notify store management as well as DATCP.

"There are laws in place that require imported wood-based items to be free of insects or insect life stages such as eggs or larva. However, not all companies follow these rules," Dahl said. These items are supposed to be inspected and heat treated or chemically treated before leaving their country of origin but problems with contaminated products still occur," Dahl said.

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Text for this news release was provided by the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. This news release is sponsored by the Wisconsin Council on Invasive Species. The Wisconsin State Legislature created the Council, to which Governor Doyle appointed 13 members. The Council's mission is to prevent and reduce the harmful impacts of invasive species on Wisconsin's environment and economy, as well as human well-being. Funding for this news release was provided by the Wisconsin Coastal Management Program and the Natural Resource Foundation's C.D. Besadny Conservation Grant Program.